

AFFECTIVE ASPECT OF LANGUAGE AND THE TEACHING OF HAUSA POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Poetry has been noted (Stones: 1966) as that genre of literature that "derives much of its power from the subtle blending of the intellectual and the affective". In other words, the poetry teacher has got to pay attention to the affective nature of his subject as much as he does to the appeal it makes to the intellect. Unfortunately, it appears that teachers of Hausa Poetry in our secondary schools pay less attention to this very important characteristic of their subject - the affective overtones of poetry. This paper intends to do two things in this regard namely, (i) to demonstrate how deeply ingrained the affective aspects of language are in Hausa Poetry. (ii) to proffer possible techniques through which the affective aspects are transmitted to the pupils in a poetry class.

Introduction

The concept "**affective**" in strict terms has been defined by educational psychologists (Fontana: 1981) as the emotional factors associated with human behaviour. In this paper, the definition suffices in so far as it is understood that words of poetry have the capacity to evoke emotions in the listener.

By the phrase '**Teaching of poetry**' simply means to impart the understanding of the meaning of poetry, and at the very best, to '**experience**' poetry.

Poetry refers to poetic compositions whether written or oral, while a poem means a patterned piece of composition that gives particular attention to arrangement of syllables and succinct exploitation of style in language in an attempt to convey information in such a way that both the intellectual and the affective are blended.

This article intends to assist teachers of Hausa poetry in making their lessons more lively and meaningful to their pupils. It is assumed here that the reasons behind the

seeming dislike for the study of poetry among our students could not be far from the fact that the affective aspects of the subject are neglected by the teachers.

Affective Aspect in Poetry

It is not possible in an article of this nature to enumerate the multifarious dimensions of the affective scope of poetry. The paper therefore confines itself to three themes of Hausa poetry that seem to me as representative demonstrations of the affective overtones. These are 'praise' (Hausa: *yabō*), sarcasm' (Hausa: *zambō*) and 'incitement' (Hausa: *zugā*). The three themes evoke pleasure/happiness, bitterness/unhappiness, and excitement/anger respectively.

Praise (*Yabō*) Theme

In praise poetry generally, the hero is commended for his good qualities and is portrayed as one unsurpassed especially by his 'rivals'. The poet here depends not only on the choice of words but also the sensibility of the society. Hausa culture accepts the recounting of one's good qualities in one's presence. The poet being an artist exploits this sensibility by not only recounting those good qualities possessed by his hero but also ascribing onto him other virtues recognized and expected by the society to be exhibited by any person occupying the position of the poet's hero. The effect of all this is to make the hero pleased. Thus, *Albaji Musa Dankwairo* praises *Yandoton Tsafe Aliyu* in the following lines, the message of which, together with the melodious rhythm, evoke pleasure;

*Dan Shehu na Shehu baban Ayaga
Mai Tsafe mai halin ya kamata
Kannenka, diyanka, bayi da barwa
Kowa da riga da doki na zama
Kob bi ka yana wadata uban Kado
Ba ya tabewa*

...

*Amadu Bello, Abubakar sun yabo
Da ministocin gidan shawara
Sun ce: Chafe an zabi sarkin da ya ima iko
Aikin da sarki duk yas sa shi ya yi (Yahya, A.B. 1997)*

The right man of Shehu, son Shehu and father of Ayaga,
Chief of Tsafe possessor of starling qualities
Your kindred and children, slaves and servants,
Each is well dressed and has a horse well bred;

- 5 Whosoever takes you as his leader prospers, O Kado's father,
He will not lose
...
Ahmad Bello and Abubakar commended you
So too the ministers of the Parliament
They said; In Tsafe an able Chief was chosen
15 Whatever assignment the Sultan gave him he executed well.

The most pleasing lines are lines 5 - 6 that give information to the hero that it has been noted that prosperity awaits whoever accepts his chieftaincy. That person never loses. This is followed by yet another pleasing statement in lines 12 - 15 where the hero is told that his superiors - the Premier, the Sultan and House of Parliament - have all commended his administration. This is certainly what a ruler in Hausaland wants to hear and see in his domain.

The effect of the praise is strengthened by the melody of the lines. The rhythm is such that the lines are set out in staccato when uttered, but enlaced semantically. The following illustrates the arrangement:

*Dan Shehu/na Shehu / baban Ayaga
Mai Tsafe/mai halin/ya kamata
Kannenka/diyanka, bayi/da barwa
Kowa da riga/da doki na zama
Kob bi ka yana/wadata/uban kado
Ba ya/tabewa*

...
*Amadu Bello, Abubakar sun yaba
Da ministocin gi/dan shawara
Sun ce/Tsafe/an zabi/sarkin da/ya
ima/iko
Aikin da sarki duk yas sa/shi ya yi (Yahya, A.B. 1997)*

The slashes represent pauses in utterance the total effect of which is body movement from the listener signalling satisfaction and pleasure.

We find a similar evocative composition resulting from an entwine of message and rhythm in Haliru Wurno's "*Safiya Da Gaskiya Taka Aiki*" (Dawn is the Twin of Truth), a written poem. He says

*Wanga Sarkin da na karimi na
Ko da dai sun boye sharifi na
Tabbata Bubakar dan waliyyi na*

Hattara kila ma shi waliyyin na
Don akwai hanyoyinn alamunta

...

Wa ka ja mai wane na ka gasa tai
Wa ka imai wane na ka tausa tai
Ba kamatai ko an yi tononai
Ba irinai ra'ayi da hange nai
Ko' ina na maganag ga in yo ta

...

Son zumunta da hani da alheri
Ga zalaka ga shi ba kibri
Ga sakin fuska ga shi mai sabri
Ga amana koyaushe ba sharri
Keta ko can bai gane sunanta (Yahya, A.B. 2002)

- English: This Sultan is good and magnanimous
It is no more secret that he is of Prophet's descent
Be assured that Abubakar is the son of a saint
Beware, for he is probably a saint himself.
- 5 for there are evidentiary signs of sainthood in him.
Who can argue with him and who can compete with him?
Who can over-power him and who can stop him? There is none of his
like no matter how much one searches
None of his like exists in terms of his good behaviour and foresight -
- 10 I will make this statement anywhere
- ...
- He cherishes kinship, shuns evil and does good
He is eloquent and is not conceited
He is cheerful and patient
He is ever trustworthy and never harmful
As for cheating he knows not its meaning

The use of exaggerated statements (hyperbole in literary language)' like in lines 2, 4, 8, 9 and 15 heightens the excitement already evoked by the enumerated qualities of the Sultan and the rhythm of the entire composition.

Sarcasm (*Zambō*) Theme

Sarcastic statements in Hausa poetry are more scathing, and therefore pregnant with affective language, in such categories as court poetry (**Hausa:** *Wakokin sarauta*) and combat poetry (**Hausa:** *wakokin maza*). Sarcasm in Hausa white stone necklace his face like the poetry evokes various emotions including anger, bitterness and laughter

or amusement. While it evokes bitterness and anger in the person to whom it is targeted, it evokes amusement or laughter in the audience.

The oral poet, Dankwairo, is reputed for his prowess in making sarcastic remarks in his compositions. In the poem quoted earlier he makes the following comments on some princes:

*Wani clan sarki yay yo shigab bori
Ya zubo ijjiyoyi ga hullatai
Ga yasgas shanu ga hannunai
Sai yac ce "In kore aljannu"*

*Ga wani clan sarki da kandaye
Ya shaho hoda kamad Delu
Ar ga wani clan sarki da tukkaye
Ga su kashi - kashi kamam Makau
'Yan yara su ce, "Barau, ina za (Gusau, S. M., 2005)*

English: A Prince there was who dressed in *bori* cult:
He spread cowries allover his cap
And held in his hand a detached cow-tail
For which he remarked, "With it I will drive away djinns"

Behold a prince wearing white stone necklace
He applied powder on his face like the proverbial Delu
Behold another prince with tufts on his head
Made in various designs like those of the proverbial Makau
When the children saw him they asked,
"Whither are you heading to, Barau?"

In the above stanza the princes referred to would feel bitter at the way the poet debases them. It is unthinkable in Hausa society for a prince to look the way the poet describes any of these princes. The attire is that of the lowest members of the society. They will naturally feel bitter.

The audience on the other hand, would be engrossed in a hilarious laughter upon hearing these remarks. They are thus convinced by the poet that these princes can never aspire to gain the popular support for them to occupy the position of a chief.

There might have been a direct influence of the above oral composition on the literate stanza by **Alhaji Garba Gwandu** given below:

Ga mai kokuwa da tukkaye
Shi yi kaye shi taushe mangaye
Bai yin mulku ko na tsuntsaye
Dan girma da damra kandaye
Ya muzanta bai bi hanya ba (Gusau, S. M., 2005)

English:

Behold (a prince) a combatant with tufts on his head
Who throws down women and holds down their plaits
He could never rule even the birds
For a royal offspring to wear white stone necklace
Is for ever debased and gone astray.

Incitement (Zuga) Theme

The purpose for which incitement theme is present in Hausa poetry is for the language in which it is expressed to instill confidence in and evoke anger of the person being addressed. It flatters him into feeling a holier-than-thou status and committing acts that he would otherwise not even have contemplated. The theme spurs the hero into bravery. It eliminates cowardice. When **Muhammadu Gambo**, an oral poet for thieves, desires to drag one of his men into a very risky theft encounter, he weaves this theme with dexterity. Gambo's hero is perturbed because Gambo refused to play even though it is a merry day. When he queried Gambo, the poet then employs affective language in response thus:

Mir ranar yin kidinku
Mir ranar wakakku shaggu
Ga ni ina wakab barayi
Ga mai kuddi ya ta~a ni
Ban sami barawo yat taba ba
Sai yac cira tsaye nig ga jikinai na kacfawa (Yahya, A.B., 2002)

English:

What use is beating the drums for you
What use is singing in praise of you, nincompoops!
When here I am a thieves' poet to the core
And there is a rich man challenging me
Yet there is no thief around to challenge him!
He promptly rose up, his body shaking.

The Poet has already succeeded in arousing his hero's anger. The hero is now ready to confront the rich man who challenged the poet. The mention of 'body shaking' is a clear testimony of the effect of the language the poet employs upon the hero.

If Gambo incites his hero through the use of a language that addresses the hero contemptuously, **Alhaji Garba Gwandu** succeeds in doing same through contemptuous language that refers to the hero's opponents;

*Barde Bubakar na Salihu manyan mutane
Suka haihe ka kak ka yarda da'yan gane-gane
Na rashin gaskiya Buhari makonin birane
Ak kakanka kak ka dau duk wasu rene-rene*

*Garba sinadari abin hada manyan gadaje
Zaki zaburo ka kai zama gun mazaje
Gwarzo garzaya ragargaji gabrin gwaraje .
Alhaji Garba dan bani mulki ki-garaje (Yahya, A.B., 1997)*

English:

Abubakar the galant warrior of Salihu, it was great men
Who were your parents, therefore tolerate no mischief
Like that of dishonesty; know that Buhari the destroyer of cities
Is your grand-father, therefore take no disrespect lightly

Garba, you are the soldering agent that fixes big beds
O Lion! leap up to attack the (worthless) valiant men
O the valiant one! pounce and pound the populous valiants
O Alhaji Garba, son of the royal lineage, defiant of haste!

The message that has been coated in an affective language characterized by personification, alliteration and sarcasm is set to incite the hero to feel fearless and ready, nay set, to attack his opponents. The personification in lines 5 and 6 (i.e. *sinadari*, *gadaje* and *zaki*) and alliteration in the first two words of lines 1, 6 and 7 as well as that involving the sound /k/ in lines 2 and 4 are directed at the hero, while the sarcastic remarks contained in lines 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 are directed at the opponents.

These then are the three major themes in Hausa poetry that one can easily point at as having an adequate measure of affective language that evokes pleasure, bitterness or anger as the case may be. Our next task now is to suggest to the teacher some techniques that he can use to teach poetry to his students, particularly when the composition is that which is replete with affective language.

Possible Techniques of Teaching Hausa Poetry

There are three important techniques that seem to be lacking in almost all the teaching sessions that the writer witnessed in the course of this write-up. It is the conclusion of this paper that the absence of these techniques accounts for the lethargy exhibited by our students in the appreciation of poetry. These techniques centre around the method that one might call "involvement" of both the teacher and students. They are:

1. Acting the poem.
2. Putting life into recitation.
4. Engaging the students.

Acting the Poem

It is not enough for the teacher to assume that since a poem is composed in the language of his students, they must comprehend it. For, to do so is to ignore the basic fact that poetry is the most refined human speech expressing human experience, material or abstract, to the nearest exactitude possible. But poetry is also complex in the sense that it evokes emotions in its attempt to overcome the cumbersome syntax of the language. Thus when the teacher presents a poem to the students he has to act it in order to avail them with the totality of its meaning. If a poem refers to a royal father the teacher has to speak and act like the royal father or act the role expected of a person who is before the royal father, as the case may warrant. If it is the brave soldier that is in the words of the poem, the teacher should act like one. Furthermore, the teacher should decide on that state of mind which the poem suggests, then proceed to recite the poem like one in that state.

Putting Life into Recitation

This technique is not far from the one discussed above. In fact, the two over-lap. However, while in the first technique (i.e. acting the poem) attention is given to the meaning of the language with all its suggestive and explicit features, in the case of the technique of putting life into recitation emphasis is on aesthetic aspects of the composition. Thus the technique involves such aspects of poetry as rhythm, rhyme and style. These features combine with the semantic aspects of language to convey to the listener / reader the message / experience of a particular poem. The example that follows is from an oral poem by Albaji Musa Dankwairo, from which we quoted earlier. It is an apt demonstration of how this combination occurs:

Taka lafiya
Ali dan Ali
Mai kayan fada

*Tarnakin gaba
Tofo na fadin
Babba dan babba
Goshin gulbi na malam
Uban Gandu, kowaj ja da kai
Ka wuce da shi yanzu
Yanzu, yanzu*

*Gizago ba ka da sabo wandara
Gamda'aren 'yan ware tsayayye
Gagara karya na Ahmadu hattara
Guru ba ka da dadin taki
Kowat takai sai yai raki
Yanzu ka iske miki ga farcenai*

The obvious feature of the above stanzas is the shortness of their lines. This produces the short metre of two feet for most of the lines in the first stanza, and three in the second. Thus the stanzas may be scanned as follows

*Taka / lafiya
Ali/ clan Ali
Mai ka /-yan fada
Tarna /-kin gaba
Babba / clan babba
Goshin / gulbi / na malam
Uban Gan / -du kowaj / ja da kai Ka wuce da / shi yanzu
Yanzu / yanzu*

*Gizago / ba ka da I sabo / wandara
Gamda'aren / 'yan ware / tsayayye
Gagara 'ar / -ya na Ama / -du hattara
Guru / ba ka da / dadin / taki
Kowat ta / -kai sai / yai raki
Yanzu ka is / -ke miki / ga farcenai*

It is this staccato sequence of the lines that produces the short rhythmic movement in utterance which in turn suggests the majestic walk of the royal father which the hero in the poem is. This is in addition to the semantic feature of the lines which depicts a strong and gallant chief.

The teacher presenting these stanzas to his class puts life in his recitation only when he recognizes similar appreciation of the lines. With the above recognition in mind he

proceeds with his recitation by echoing the short rhythmic movement. He thus incorporates brief pauses in between the feet of the metre of each line. And to achieve this he is bound to combine this with 'acting' the utterance. As he utters the segments he makes body movements, like moving the head sideways or making steps in zigzag form with his legs.

Engaging the Students

It will have been clear while discussing the first two techniques that the teaching of poetry can be lively, indeed it should be, since it embodies a lot of actions in not only its meaning but its aesthetic nature as well. This being the case, it is not difficult to arrive at the conclusion that in the teaching of poetry the teacher is amply provided with opportunities to engage his students in the appreciation of the poems he brings into the classroom. They cannot be passive learners.

It is in the light of this that it is being suggested here that the lessons of the poetry teacher should be characterized by such activities from the students as discussion, individual attempts at correct recitals and of course, actual dramatizing of the various actions suggested by the poems. The teacher would in due course come to realize that it is the students who would discover the road to appreciating the poems he brings to them. He will achieve this if he pays attention to guiding the students through elicitation and giving them opportunities to do it alone.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made to demonstrate that affective aspects of language are replete in Hausa poetry, whether oral or written. This has further been explained as the poet's way of conveying experience which would prove to be difficult if not impossible to achieve through dogmatic adherence to the cumbersome syntax of the human language. It would have appeared to the reader that in poetry one finds an effective usage of human emotions to convey a message.

The paper then proceeds to discuss possible techniques that a poetry teacher can use to make his poetry lessons lively, devoid of passiveness and lethargy. These techniques which in totality are referred to in this paper as the method of "Involvement" are: (i) acting the poem, (ii) putting life into recitation and (iii) engaging the students. It is however, to be noted that these are by no means intended to be the panacea for passivity and lethargy, nor should be construed as the only possible techniques. They should in fact, be employed along with such other conventional techniques as may be relevant, like explaining unfamiliar and difficult words and phrases at the beginning of lessons. It should also be stated that the choice of which techniques to employ or of what sequence the use of all the techniques

should be, is something this paper leaves to the discretion of the teacher. The main objective is "how do we make poetry lessons more lively and comprehensible?"

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